3.9 FARMLAND

3.9.1 Studies and Coordination

The viability of land in long-term agricultural use and the importance of individual farms are the focus of the State of Washington's various farmland protection acts. Farmland is usually divided into three distinct categories: prime farmland, unique farmland, and farmland of statewide or local importance. Prime farmland is land of exceptional physical and chemical soil characteristics that can be used in agriculture with minimum user input of nutrients, labor, etc. The land must also not be in or committed to urban development or water storage. Unique farmland is lower quality than prime farmland but is still able to produce high-value food or grain products. Farmland of statewide or local importance is farmland that meets Washington State and USDA guidelines and is not protected within the other two groups.

All affected farmland was evaluated to determine the quantity of acres potentially affected. Potential disruption of agricultural uses and farming activities during construction and operation also was evaluated.

The local Natural Resources Conservation Service District Office is the primary contact and authority when dealing with the conversion of farmland for all projects. The offices of the King County Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) also provided assistance.

3.9.2 Methodology

Digital data for farmlands in King County were used to locate and map farmlands within the study area for each alternative (King County GIS, Comprehensive Plan Agriculture Layer, 1998). Locations where alternatives would have effects on farmland were then evaluated based on conceptual plans of the proposed improvements. Figure 3.9-1 shows farmlands located within the study area.

No farmlands exist within the study area in Snohomish County; consequently, no additional detailed analysis was conducted.

The farmland analyses in this section are based on the *I-405 Corridor Program Draft Farmland Expertise Report* (DEA, 2001), herein incorporated by reference.

3.9.3 Affected Environment

3.9.3.1 Farmland

While farmlands are not dominant features within the corridor, they are deemed important and are protected in both King and Snohomish counties. In the Snohomish County portion of the study area, there is no protected farmland. Farmlands in Kenmore would not be affected, and are not discussed here. The northern part of the study area in King County contains portions of the Sammamish River Valley Agricultural District near major roadways. King County owns the development rights on approximately 770 acres of farmland in the Sammamish Valley. Except for 37 acres that are within the city boundary of Redmond, these properties are located in the unincorporated King County part of the valley. All of the farms in this region are also protected under the King County FPP. Within the study area, there are no protected farmlands south of Redmond. The King County FPP currently maintains 12,800 acres of the more than 42,290 acres of farmland within King County.

King County Ordinance 4341, which enabled the FPP, prioritized properties for acquisition of development rights; properties in the Sammamish River Valley were listed as "Priority One" properties. Priority One properties were located in areas designated Agricultural Lands of County Significance by the County in 1977, based on the presence of agricultural Capability Class II and Class III soils and the use of these soils for farming.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Survey for King County groups soils according to their suitability for most kinds of field crops. The groups, referred to as capability classes, are made according to the limitations of the soils when used for field crops, the risk of damage to the soil when they are used, and the way they respond to treatment. The capability classes are designated by Roman numerals I through VIII, with lower number capability class soils having fewer limitations than those having a higher number class. Class I soils have few limitations restricting their use; however, there are no Class I soils in King County. Class II soils are the best soils (i.e., have the fewest limitations) occurring in King County and are defined as having moderate limitations that reduce the species of plants (grown) or requiring moderate conservation practices.

Approximately 730 acres of Class II soils in the Sammamish Valley are protected under the FPP. About 12 acres of Class III soils are also protected under the FPP. Class III soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require special conservation practices, or both. The remaining FPP acreage in the valley consists of Class IV soils, which have very severe limitations that reduce the species of plants that can be grown, require very careful management, or both; and Class VI soils, which have severe limitations that make them generally unsuited to cultivation and limit their use largely to pasture, woodland, or wildlife habitat. The Class IV and Class VI soils are in small areas that slope down to the valley floor west of the Woodinville - Redmond Road. Since they are part of the parcels that contain the Class II and Class III soils, they are also protected under the FPP. There are no Class V soils in the study area.

The federal Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) is intended to minimize the extent to which federal activities contribute to the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses. The FPPA requires federal agencies to examine the impact of their programs before they approve any activity that would convert farmland. Federal agencies fill out a Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form (form AD-1066) to rate the relative impacts of projects and score the relative value of sites subject to the FPPA regulation. Under the FPPA, farmlands that score 160 points or less on the AD-1066 land evaluation and site assessment are considered farmland not needing to be given further consideration for protection. All of the Sammamish Valley farmlands fall into this category but are protected under the local jurisdiction guidelines.

3.9.4 Impacts

3.9.4.1 No Action Alternative

Construction Impacts

All of the impacts to farmlands within the I-405 Corridor are in the Sammamish Valley region. The impacts all result from road widening improvements, which have a linear impact on farmland without affecting the majority of the farms or causing additional fragmentation of local farms. Impacts for all of the alternatives are summarized in Table 3.9-1 with the No Action Alternative projects included in all of the action alternatives.

Legend: Farmlands in the Study Area

- Farmland
- Study Area Boundary
- County Boundaries
- Highways
- Roadways
- Railways

N

1 0 1 2 3 Miles

SNOHOMISH

KING

Mill Creek
Lynnwood
Edmonds
Woodway
Mountlake Terrace
Brier
Bothell
Kenmore
Woodinville
Shoreline
Lake Forest Park
Simonds Rd NE
Duvall
NE 128th St
Kirkland
Redmond
Lake Washington
Union Bay
Lake Union
Narrow Point
Hunts Point
Clyde Hill
Medina
NE 8th St
Bellevue
Redmond Fall City Rd
Lake Sammamish
Seattle
Beaux Arts
Mercer Island
148th Ave SE
Sammamish
Duwamish River
Coal Creek Pky SE
Newcastle
Issaquah
Tukwila
SE 128th St
Renton
Burien
Normandy Park
SeaTac
SE Petrovitsky Rd
68th Ave
132nd Ave SE
Kent
Des Moines
Maple Valley
Covington
Auburn
Federal Way

Farmlands in the Study Area

Figure No. 3.9-1

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Table 3.9-1: Farmlands Potentially Affected

Alternative	Improvement	Statewide and/or Locally Important Farmland Affected (acres)
No Action Alternative	Willows Road Widening (R-47)	5.5
	SR 202/140th Pl. NE Widening (R-111)	0.4
Total		**5.9**
Alternative 1, HCT/TDM[a]	Willows Road Widening (R-47)	5.5
	SR 202/140th Pl. NE Widening (R-111)	0.4
Total		**5.9**
Alternative 2, Mixed Mode with HCT/Transit	Willows Road Widening (R-47)	5.5
	SR 202/140th Pl. NE Widening (R-111)	0.4
	SR 202/175th Pl. NE Widening (R.PA-28 & R.AC-17)	0.2
Total		**6.1**
Alternative 3, Mixed Mode	Willows Road Widening (R-47)	5.5
	SR 202/140th Pl. NE Widening (R-111)	0.4
	Willows Road Widening (R.AC-16)	6.8
	SR 202/175th Pl. NE Widening (R.PA-28 & R.AC-17)	0.2
Total		**12.9**
Alternative 4, General Capacity	Willows Road Widening (R-47)	5.5
	Willows Road Widening (R.AC-15 & R-111)	0.4
	Willows Road Widening (R.AC-16) (RPA-28)	6.8
	SR 202 Widening (R.AC-18 & R.PA-28)	7.2
	SR 202/175th Pl. NE Widening (R.PA-28 & R.AC-17)	0.2
Total		**20.1**
Preferred Alternative	Willows Road Widening (R-47)	5.5
	Willows Road Widening (R.AC-15 & R-111)	0.4
	Willows Road Widening (R.AC-16) (RPA-28)	6.8
	SR 202 Widening (R.AC-18 & R.PA-28)	7.2
	SR 202/175th Pl. NE Widening (R.PA-28 & R.AC-17)	0.2
Total		**20.1**

[a] Alternative 1 has no projects beyond those in the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, two areas of farmland would potentially be affected by SR 202 improvements and improvements in the Willows Road Corridor. These widening improvements could impinge about 16 feet into the edge of the farmland adjacent to each roadway, directly affecting about 5.9 acres of farmland. Construction zones along the roadway would be replanted after construction in accordance with local and state guidelines. Landscaped buffer areas could also protect adjacent farms from the runoff from roadways. Projects in the immediate vicinity of farmlands could produce dust and/or air pollution, but with negligible to no effect on agricultural zones. No prime or unique farmlands would be affected.

Operational Impacts

No prime or unique farmlands would be affected by operation of the I-405 corridor improvements.

3.9.4.2 Alternative 1: HCT/TDM Emphasis

Alternative 1 would have no impact on farmland in the I-405 corridor beyond those described previously for the No Action Alternative. This is the lowest potential effect of any action alternative.

3.9.4.3 Alternative 2: Mixed Mode with HCT/Transit Emphasis

Construction Impacts

Under Alternative 2, one area of protected farmland potentially would be affected beyond that identified in the No Action Alternative. This additional improvement could impinge minimally into the edge of the farmland adjacent to SR 202, directly affecting 0.2 acre of farmland, resulting in 6.1 total acres of impact. This effect is nearly as low as for the No Action Alternative and Alternative 1.

Construction zones along the roadway would be replanted after construction in accordance with local and state guidelines. Landscaped buffers could also protect farms from the runoff from roadways. Improvements in the immediate vicinity of farmlands could produce dust and/or air pollution, but with negligible to no effect on agricultural zones. No prime or unique farmlands would be affected.

Operational Impacts

No prime or unique farmlands would be affected by operation of the I-405 corridor improvements.

3.9.4.4 Alternative 3: Mixed Mode Emphasis

Construction Impacts

Under Alternative 3, three areas of protected farmland would potentially be affected beyond those identified in the No Action Alternative. These additional improvements could impinge minimally into the edge of the farmland adjacent to SR 202 and Willows Road, directly affecting about 7 acres of farmland. This level of impact is about midway between the best- and worst-ranked action alternatives resulting in 12.9 total acres of impact.

Construction zones along the roadway would be replanted after construction in accordance with local and state guidelines. Landscaped buffers could also protect farms from the runoff from roadways. Improvements in the immediate vicinity of farmlands could produce dust and/or air pollution, but with negligible to no effect on agricultural zones. No prime or unique farmlands would be affected.

Operational Impacts

No prime or unique farmlands would be affected by operation of the I-405 corridor improvements.

3.9.4.5 Alternative 4: General Capacity Emphasis

Construction Impacts

Alternative 4, as with the Preferred Alternative, has the potential to impact seven areas of farmland beyond those identified in the No Action Alternative. These additional improvements under Alternative 4 could impinge minimally into the edge of the farmland adjacent to SR 202 and Willows Road, directly affecting 14.2 acres of farmland. Alternative 4, along with the Preferred Alternative, has the greatest potential to impact protected farmlands. This will result in a total of 20.1 acres of impacts under Alternative 4.

Construction zones along the roadway would be replanted after construction in accordance with local and state guidelines. Landscaped buffers could also protect farms from the runoff from roadways. Improvements in the immediate vicinity of farmlands could produce dust and/or air pollution, but with negligible to no effect on agricultural zones. No prime or unique farmlands would be affected.

Operational Impacts

No prime or unique farmlands would be affected by operation of the I-405 corridor improvements.

3.9.4.6 Preferred Alternative

Construction Impacts

Under the Preferred Alternative, seven areas of protected farmland would potentially be affected beyond those identified in the No Action Alternative. These additional improvements under the Preferred Alternative could impinge minimally into the edge of the farmland adjacent to SR 202 and Willows Road, directly affecting 14.2 acres of farmland. The Preferred Alternative, along with Alternative 4, has the greatest potential to impact protected farmlands. This will result in a total of 20.1 acres of impacts under the Preferred Alternative.

Construction zones along the roadway would be replanted after construction in accordance with local and state guidelines. Landscaped buffers could also protect farms from the runoff from roadways. Improvements in the immediate vicinity of farmlands could produce dust and/or air pollution, but with negligible to no effect on agricultural zones. No prime or unique farmlands would be affected.

Operation Impacts

No prime or unique farmlands would be affected by operation of the I-405 corridor improvements.

3.9.5 Mitigation Measures

Under the No Action Alternative, the Willows Road improvements could be constructed so that any expansion outside the right-of-way could be done on the west (southbound) side, thus avoiding farmland impact. Avoidance of impingement on farmland along the NE 124th Street improvements is not practicable, as farmlands exist on both sides of the right-of-way.

For Alternative 1, no adverse impacts on farmlands are expected to occur beyond those identified for the No Action Alternative; therefore, no additional mitigation measures would be required.

Where practicable, considering other social, economic, and environmental impacts, all of the improvements for Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and the Preferred Alternative will be designed so that any expansion outside of the right-of-way is done on the side of the road that does not affect farmland, thus avoiding any substantial farmland impacts.

Other mitigation measures could include the landscaped buffer areas noted above.